THE Interspecies Newsletter

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What the Birds Sing

Steal a little and they throw you in jail,
steal a lot and they make you king.
- Bob Dylan

Seventeenth Century Europe conceived nature as a maintenance-free machine designed, constructed, and finally set a-spin by a perfect male God as a fitting tribute to his personal favorite, the human race. So the learned males of that day spent an inordinate amount of energy churning out anthropocentric arguments to explain away what less of a believer might just as easily have construed as ungodly flaws in the divine handiwork. The physician George Cheyne explained that the Creator made the horse's excrement smell sweet, because he knew that men would often be in its vicinity. Horse flies, said the Virginian William Byrd had been created so 'that men should exercise their wits in order to guard against them'. Camels, which don't need much water, were sensibly allotted to the deserts of Arabia. Song birds had been placed by God on this Earth to entertain and delight mankind. As for cattle and sheep, Henry More in 1653 was convinced that they had only been given life in the first place so as to keep their meat fresh 'till we shall have need to eat them'. Even the lowly louse was indespensable, explained the Reverend William Kirby, because it provided a powerful incentive to habits of cleanliness. Keith Thomas' excellent book, *Man and the Natural World* (Pantheon), is chock full of such glorious examples of 17th century thinking about nature.

I do not mention all of this to set a-spin an exposition about a long gone culture not yet privy to the objectivist's view of nature as prescribed by modern science. To the contrary, despite the quaintness of the 17th century view, it seems we today possess not a wit more wisdom than we did back then. The differences between the two worldviews seems primarily one of information levels that aid in accessing power, and not of any accrued wisdom.

The fact that we continue to share this planet with most of the animals known to the likes of Rene Descartes, offers a crucial insight into the major environmental distinction between ourselves then, ourselves now, and ourselves as viewed from 300 years hence, in the year 2300. We can only hope that those men and women who inhabit our own future might someday glance back across the years to find some humor in the *quaint truths* as espoused by the learned and holy males of this late twentieth century.

As those who went before us were blinded by the light of an anthropocentric God who controlled nature's destiny from above, so today, we remain blighted by a similar need to behold ourselves separate and above the rest of nature. How shall we name this current attitude: anthropocentric atheism? No, entirely too academic in its tone. Objectivity? Yes, much better; and although it is not usually thought of as an attitude per se, it strikes to the very heart of the issue. Objectivity, as it is utilized by the biology of this late 20th century treats us as gods: as if we can somehow view nature from the outside; invisible and invincible; justified to manipulate animals and environments in the name of that just cause known as the pursuit of knowledge.

But a change seems to be in the air. Whereas ten years ago information gathering was easily justified in and of itself; today a new generation of biologists has decided to first ask whether or not any study helps to heal the planet. It is the difference between the *Specimen biology* that separates us from nature,

and *Shamanic Biology* that heals the planet by bringing us back into the fold of nature.

Those of us who just returned from the IC Orca Project, witnessed about half the number of whales as we ordinarily encounter in Johnstone Strait. Many within the local research community blamed this paucity of orcas on the fact that 1988 was also an exceptionally bad year for salmon. Contrarily, some sports fishermen thought it to be an exceptionally good year for salmon. Yet even if someone else was able to convince himself that the salmon were depleted; do 10 million salmon impact 150 orcas more than, say, 15 or even 20 million?

We all noticed, instead, that every single time the orcas were sighted during daylight hours, there were inevitably two whale watching boats and *two to six* scientific researchers right on their tails. In our own non-methodical and admittedly intuitive assessment of the situation, it began to seem *highly likely* that the very sentient and acoustically sensitive whales had departed the Strait in their own defense. After all, there is well over a thousand miles of salmon-filled coastline in British Columbia where they do not also fall prey to the constant irritating buzz of outboard motors. Those researchers who harass the most also argue the most insistently that the whale disappearance be lain entirely upon the sleek head of the salmon. Thus begins a tale of Catch 22-logic driving *specimen field biology* like so many researchers driving up the back of a baby orca.

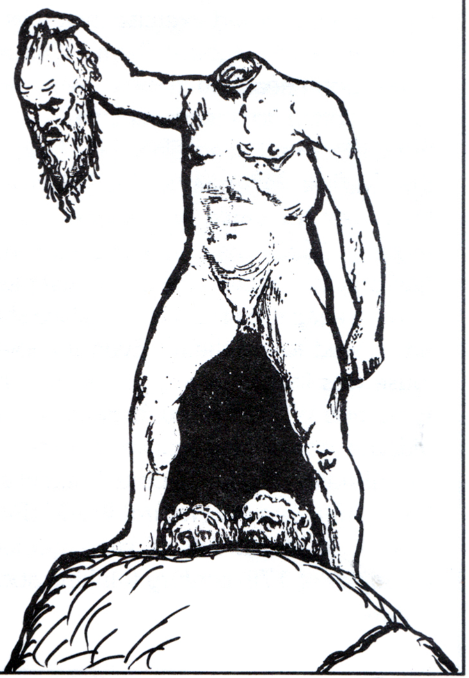
All of the researchers in Johnstone Strait have received government permits that specifically permit them to harass the otherwise protected whales. On one level, research justifies harassment. On another, research and harassment begin to seem like interchangeable terms defining the same process. Naturally, those researchers who harass the most also argue the loudest that they can not collect the *data that describes orca behavior* unless they are permitted to observe the whales on a regular basis, meaning, from motor boats. However, there are other *benign researchers* in the area who have chosen to observe the whales from the less invasive perch of a shore station. The work of these biologists seems primarily whale-centered, motivated by a compassion to protect the local community of whales. Contrarily, the invasive researchers seem primarily human-centered, motivated by an academic calling to gather information *from* the whales; adding their page to one of the journals that serve the scientific community.

But now some benign researchers are starting to collect evidence that the whales vocalize quite differently when the research boats go home for the afternoon. It may seem almost too obvious to a layman, but this implies: firstly, that the observers are neither invisible nor separate; secondly, that the whales are not machines; and thirdly, that the whales have been exhibiting conscious choice all along. In other words, years of accumulated acoustic data serves primarily to depict the orcas as they *invent a response* to the presence of loud motor boats in the vicinity. The behavior that is ascribed to whales, reflects the behavior manifested by researchers. The process of gathering information, has actually invented the information. So much for specimen science providing the keys to unlock the mysteries of animal behavior.

There is yet another example that forces us to search even deeper for answers about healing this planet. The great rainforest crisis is upon us. With third world populations soaring, the uncontrolled exploitation of the *resource* of the rain forest seems utterly inevitable. Yet if the problem seems inextricably bound to overpopulation, does the primary remedy lie in the control of human numbers? Hopefully someday. Instead, one of the most forceful and far-reaching ideas volunteered to solve the problem offers a giant computer system to monitor fluctuations in forest chemistry. Ironically, all the monitoring in the world is not going to directly stay the hand of even one logger. Instead, this purported solution seeks to hand over to the third world governments and their industrialist advisors a mechanism that serves to effectively *control* the formerly *uncontrolled rainforest*. We give them the tools for management, and they trade back to us a centralized management policy. We solve the problem by dominating the environment more thoroughly than those who already dominate the scene by chopping down all the trees.

The question of saving the rain forest is tricky, because who is the enemy here, the exploiters, or the uncontrolled rainforest? Somehow, we seem most adept at saving it by taming it; justifying the huge cost in our own personal favorite, technology, by emphasizing such human rewards as the number of medicines we humans might someday extract from its yet untapped vines and roots. The completeness of the rainforest, for and of itself, is simply not part of the equation.

Herein lies the larger-than-life riddle inherent in the parable of the rainforest: We can not sustain our population



growth unless we tame every critical geographic and metabolic aspect of the Earth. But our unbridled presence *already* impacts every control mechanism the planet has to offer. Thus, we can not *effectively* control entities such as rain forests until we first learn to control ourselves. As it stands, we control everything and nothing. Quite a trick if you can get away with it. We can not.

Adherents to science's 20th century biological paradigm sincerely believe that they are *discovering* and *gathering* information that leads to knowledge and truth about the natural world. Yet from the hindsight of the year 2300, it may very well seem obvious if not utterly tragic that this logical and objective methodology had instead, *invented* a mechanical description of the Earth that exists nowhere in nature outside the 20th century mind. Here was a mind controlled by an invisible Western God who refused, even at that late date, to consider masquerading in any other image but our own. As we invented him, so he invented us: a civilization disconnected from any sense of equality or collaboration with all other beings.

But why is it, that at this late date, one still rarely hears such issues as the destruction of the rain forests discussed primarily as *a crisis in perception*? The answer is straightforward enough: such a debate inevitably brings science, itself, to task. It makes more *sense* to ration our billions on technocratic monitors rather than on a global attunement to our own senses, our own perception. After all, the latter is highly unscientific and is thus, well, unscientific.

But listen, there are new songs being sung all about us. Perk up an ear. Some of us are singing from the rooftops that *this so called objectivity* does not exist now, never did in the past, and will continue to not exist in the future. We are not above nature. We are full of it. Go out and listen to the orcas, to the songbirds who do not sing either to entertain or delight human beings even though they do. Most species of songbirds spend their winters in the rain forests of the planet. Their drastic decline in population is actually the single critical indicator of rain forest destruction that directly touches those of us who live in North America and Europe. Their increasing silence makes a statement and then asks a question: It is not working. How could it?

Too many scientists err in believing that their discipline is cast in stone and that their theories are truth. But change, itself, may be the only scientific constant worth taking seriously as we wheeze our way into the 21st century. It is that same old song sung by maestro Heisenberg when he obliterated 300 years of physics with a mathematical intuition that concluded: we are full of it. It is full of us. Who, in turn, will obliterate Heisenberg?

Only through a total surrender to this god of mutability; this Hindu, Voodoo, Zulu, Orca, Songbird god of Nature, can any of us hope to ease the usual gasp and lunge of a culture bumbling its way towards the panacea of its own future. Let us resurrect the lesson of attunement as taught by the Amazonian Indians who knew in their hearts and traditions that they were one and the same with the rain forest. The Jivaro used to sing that when you harm the web of the Earth you set in motion a kind of masochistic masturbation. Destroy the rain forest and you commit suicide. Or, as an Inuvialuit man told me this past summer: "we used to plan for 100 generations. Long time, that."

Why is it that only the mystics among us ever seem to heed the wisdom of traditional peoples? Actually, the Aboriginals would probably be the very first to remind us that words never do suffice. Instead, we need to experience such sentiments directly in our own heart. So forget the Jivaro, the Inuvialuit. Propel yourself outside and listen to the fruity if not diminished rendition of that same wisdom as sung by the tanagers and orioles. There is nothing mystical about it. The birds have been very patient, singing and resinging that same rain forest song for thousands of years now. Listen to it; it is easily the most important lyric and melody around. If we start to sing the melody of the rain forest from enough rooftops so that enough people hear it, maybe we can even sing the songbirds back to their former status. Attune to it, day by day, millenium by millenium, and soon, presto! you find yourself nested within the fabric of nature. Some of us call it the interspecies vision: Learning to breathe the songs of the birds through a kind of *tuning osmosis*. It only gets under your skin when you are able to feel that it has *always* been under your skin.

- Jim Nollman

Lone Wolf Circles

The Beluga Peace Project

We camped where the MacKenzie River meets the Beaufort Sea; where the 100 mile wide and shallow delta heated the fresh water to 65 degrees. The terrain was strange; a flat, verdant, practically empty oasis of estuarine warmth, framed on one side by the polar terminus of the Rocky Mountains. The vistas were surrealistic, providing us with no sense of distance; the most substantial objects too often proved to be mirages, too often leaving us awash in our own baffled sensibilities. Actually, the tallest landmarks were two-legged beings like ourselves: sandhill cranes squawking and bouncing about the horizon on legs so long they left us giggling in disbelief. There were never any tides to mention, and the so-called ocean still ran fresh and muddy 40 miles from where the river was supposed to have ended.

We perched our campsite squarely between the peaty shoreline and an interminable meadow of fluffy cottongrass that made the cranes look as if they were dancing in dry ice smoke like on MTV. But This landscape wasn't foreign like Mars. No, instead we felt like extraterrestrials squatting upon an Earth constructed from familiar images pulled from the most perplexing dreams of our own childhood.

There were supposed to be seven of us onsite. The Soviet film maker was about to leave for the airport when the Canadian authorities suddenly pulled his visa on the heels of one of those redundant embassy scandals created for the edification of Defense budgets. So instead we were six explorers trying to come to terms with our own professional presence on this Arctic beachfront paradise. Each of us was quickly and irrevocably blessed with our very own halo of mosquitos that kept us more covered up than an Arabic woman and more self-aware of our extremities than any mere Yogi. And of course The beluga whales showed up three times during our first three days onsite, appearing like a band of pied pipers wandering into town to blow a strange tune on their stranger sounding trombones. You could hear them a quarter mile away, blowing and snorting; three foot-wide, grey/white oblongs chugging through the three foot-deep mud/waters; looking almost too much like hippos wallowing in some equatorial waterhole. Except these animals knew how to move quickly. They'd push themselves up from the mud, give a toot, slide back down without a splash, speed off just under the surface and then repeat the same three dimensional Rhumba step all over again until...gone! Naturally, it took us just three days for us to prepare for our first interspecies meeting.

So like any pied piper, they chose to disappear entirely. We later heard meteorological rumours that the same greenhouse effect that had barbecued the Great Plains all summer, had sent flash floods to the MacKenzie basin. The inordinate amount of mud that spewed into the delta kept the beluga whales 20 or more miles offshore and away from our magazine-writing, sound-recording, still-photographing aspirations.

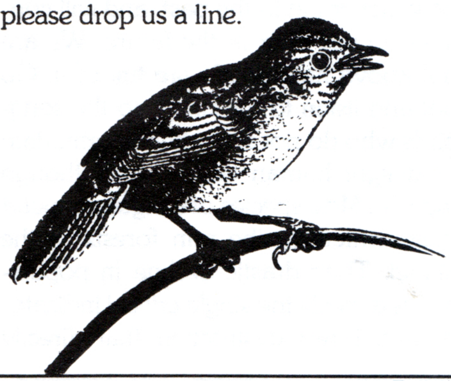
Three of our party left after one week; escaped back to their usual lives while the quieter three of the original six pack got quieter still during another whole week spent around the clay firepit named THE BELUGA CAFE. Now our actions seemed more disconnected than ever from normal reality; as if we had pitched our tents inside the poster for a Grade-B adventure film. Was it our imagination, or did the large four legged mammals seem to venture closer? Moose, caribou; and one afternoon two grizzly bears decided to play roly-poly just three hundred yards from our kitchen. But instead of worrying that this neighborliness might be the start of a trend, we drank hot chocolate all day long, and still seemed to lose weight as the weather went about its usual business of rising and dropping 35 degrees and 20 MPH in seemingly, a matter of minutes. Ultimately, who among us could do anything but fail the test to describe the humble, holy, silent, giggling, entrancing, literary, ionizing, Arctic week experienced by our three human castaways. None of the three survived. And we are all the better for it.

Things come together. The 30 foot shallow-bottomed catamaran that had dropped us off two weeks earlier, finally returned to carry us across 100 miles of delta to our hotel in the town of Inuvik. There, the boat's owner, an engineer for EXXON, and a semi-professional violinist, confessed that he'd spent an inordinate amount of the interim period listening to IC's interspecies music tape, *Orcas Greatest Hits*. He shyly asked if we planned to return next year. If so, then he would be glad to donate his boat for an entire week or two which would give us full access to the belugas no matter where they chose to wallow. He only wanted to play his Northern fiddle tunes with the beluga herds.

Then he dropped a conceptual bombshell. If we agreed, he also wished to promote this idea of human/beluga music-making among the local beluga hunters, many of whom were also avid musicians. Then when we returned to the delta in the summer of 1989, he could arrange a visit to one of the beluga camps. Perhaps we might spend a productive evening sharing our benign interspecies communication with these men who only knew to kill the white whale. And given the nature of the hunt, we needn't worry that it might entice the hunters to develop new tools for killing. No, only new thoughts about not-killing.

Two weeks later the Soviet film maker dropped down in the Seattle airport for a meeting about our mutual future. Feeling a bit wiser about the sorcery of international politics, he expressed a strong desire to try again next summer.

Ultimately, the Beluga Peace Project seems a good idea getting better; already picking up momentum for July of 1989. If any of our readers have any ideas about documenting this future rendition, please drop us a line.

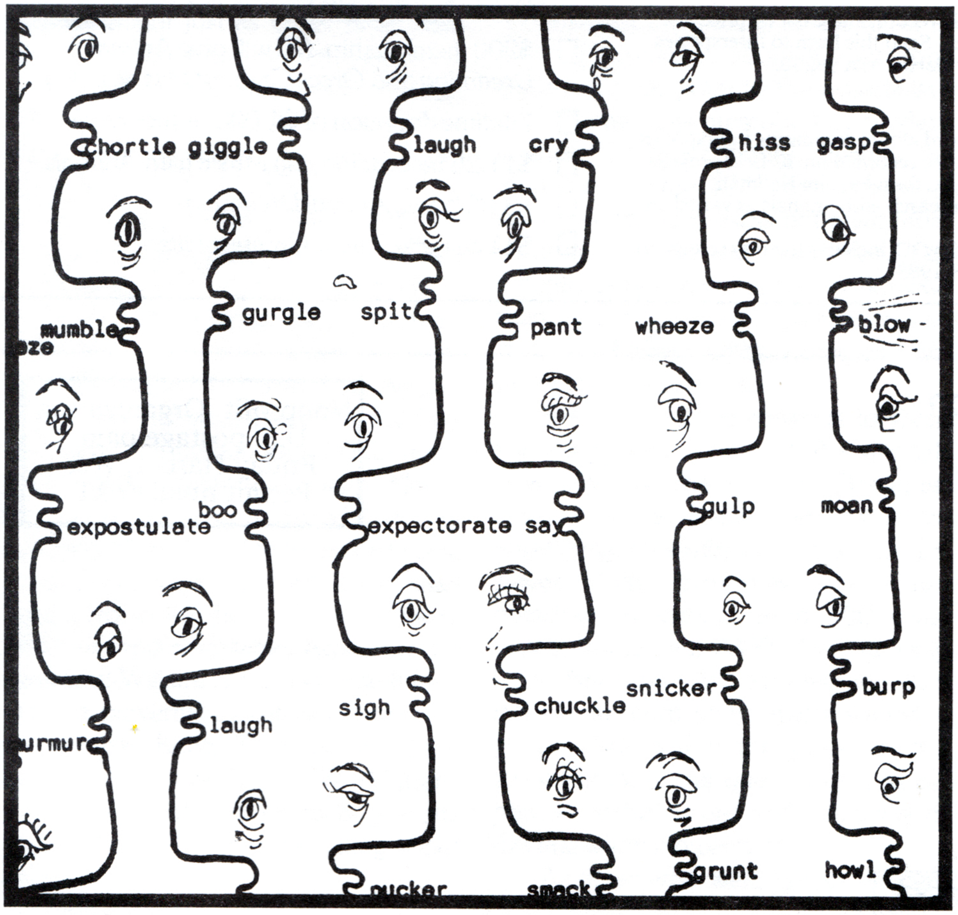


The Pacific Bridge Event

We receive several letters a week from people who ask how they might get more involved in the work of IC. While many people want to participate directly in one or another of our field projects; others express a willingness to help out with our office activities, newsletter production, and fundraising. Still another category of interest comes from students, curious to learn if we offer programs for academic credit; and, in general, what opportunities await a person interested in interspecies communication as a career.

For those who wish to delve deeper, we invite you to be part of a reunion – a review of where we've been and an exploration of where we are going with interspecies communication. *The Pacific Bridge Event* will be held on the Big Island of Hawaii in December 1988; and bring together many people who have been actively involved in the field over the past ten years. This four day council will revolve around the concept of the interspecies vision as lifestyle: how we live, how we work, and how we celebrate the interdependence we share with all beings. The event will feature presentations about music, art, science, and environment; and also offer a time to help us explore the possible futures of human/dolphin community.

The council facilitators include: IC directors Jim and Katy Nollman; O.R.C.A. director Virginia Coyle, who recently focalized the project to free captive dolphins Joe and Rosie; Dolphin Legendarian Peter Shenstone from Australia; Nancy Goddard, director of Womenspeak Wilderness Program; Environmentalist Dexter Cate best known for his work at Iki Island Japan; European artist Mickey Remann; and Jean Luc-Bozzoli and Joan Ocean who offer a visual journey into the Dolphin Connection. Our own logo was designed by Jean Luc. The cost and exact dates are being set as we go to press. For more info, please call: (206)378-5186



Monkey Business

In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, about 60 monkeys attacked joggers and visitors to the Penang Botanical Gardens recently, after a young man stoned a baby monkey to death. The monkeys attacked all those wearing yellow shirts, because the killer had been dressed in a yellow shirt.

IC Needs a Boat

This, our tenth year of the IC orca project was an attempt to go back to the roots of our longterm relationship with the wild orcas of Vancouver Island. The small group of 9 adults contrasted sharply with the 20-30 adults we've hosted during each of the past five years. Because we did not involve such a large group of sponsors who would ordinarily help pay for the charter of a large boat, we opted to construct our acoustic sound system inside a kayak. This severely limited our access to the whales. Although most of us enjoyed the lessened responsibility as well as the silence of the 1988 camp, we also acknowledge that the relationship with the orcas suffered for not having a large floating platform from which to work. The question we now face is how to get the use of a boat without having to resort to running a tour operation to pay for it.

IC puts out a call to its membership to help us locate a 30-50 foot boat, moored in the Pacific Northwest, for our use during the Orca Project of August 1989. We prefer a motor boat over a sailboat, but will consider anything that floats. We can provide our own experienced skipper, but will consider suggestions for other participants as well. IC offers a tax deduction, and possibly some cash, in trade for its use.